

Bound to Violence

A Southern African Conversation

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Editorial Note

What is the sound and feel of South-South political theory in action, as a conversation on the ground? We sat down in February 2021—at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and during the outbreak of civil war in Ethiopia—with Imraan Coovadia (*Revolution and Non-violence in Tolstoy, Gandhi, and Mandela*), Panashe Chigumadzi (*These Bones Will Rise Again*), and Bongani Kona (Zimbabwean essayist and short story writer) to test the parameters of this question. We wanted to rethink the category of revolution, along a razor's edge, without falling into the abyss of reactionary politics that oppose revolution outright. These authors' works, we sensed then, intimate that simply to defend an older anti-colonial generation through a nostalgic form is reactionary in its own right. Is it possible to generate conversation among thinkers across multiple geographies and generations, and, in doing so, to find new language addressing the question of violence and nonviolence in revolutionary change?¹

This conversation is firmly located in the context of Southern African political struggle. At the same time, it invites us to draw lessons more generally about the “microsociology” of violence, as well as about “civil” interactions produced by racist systems of colonial power. Bongani Kona begins by asking about the enduring place of ancestral voices in South Africa and Zimbabwe. As the conversation unfolds, a productive tension emerges about the specificity of the now and the wisdom of history. The speakers assert sharp generational differences across time periods and yet call for attention to pasts that travel like spirits in us all. We ask—knowing all too well that this is asking yet once again—what is revolution in the formerly colonized world? When does it begin and when does it end?

—Arash Davari and Elleni Centime Zeleke

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Bongani Kona: Earlier this week Stacy Hardy told me a story about the journalist Jason Stearns: “He is working on his magnum opus, *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters: The Collapse of the Congo and the Great War for Africa*, an ambitious tome that sets out to try to explain the Congo’s history of violence. The book is ten years in the making, based on personal and lived experience and in-depth interviews. The word death runs like a litany, a dirge on every page. One Congolese man laughs in Stone’s face, telling him he will never be able to understand the Congo because his Western mind cannot comprehend the liminal space between life and death, and how the dead live on among us.” When I read that, I immediately thought about you, Panashe, and the title of your book, *These Bones Will Rise Again*. Those were the last words uttered by Mbuya Nehanda before she was hanged by colonial settlers in 1898. How crucial are the voices of ancestors and memory to your project? Could you address the title of your book and the significance of its prophetic words?



Panashe Chigumadzi: The word *ukukhumbula* has really been in my mind of late, especially during this last year when I've been in South Africa. *Ukukhumbula* means to remember; I've been thinking about remembrance as method and about thinking with and through ancestors as an epistemological grounding for understanding who we are. Here *ukukhumbula* means re-member, and re-memory. One of the most famous television shows in South Africa, called *Khumbul'ekhaya*, or "Remember Home," invites us to take memory quite seriously. It's more popular than celebrity shows and a whole range of entertainment. It's popular because of this desire to remember. In re-memory is the understanding that nothing is ever lost. Much of this history remains within us.

Mbuya Nehanda, for example—someone reductively known as an anti-colonial heroine who fought in Zimbabwe during what we now call the first Chimurenga war (1896–97)—was a spirit medium, a carrier of a spirit that has existed for many centuries. In dominant nationalist narratives she is reduced to a particular moment in time, leading a war against the colonists of her time, the British South Africa Company. Mbuya Nehanda was decapitated for her role in the war. Her dying words were, "These bones shall rise again," or "My bones will rise again." Fast-forward to what is known as the second Chimurenga war in Zimbabwe during the late 1960s and 1970s. Mbuya Nehanda's name is again invoked: the independence struggle is said to have been fought in her name. Mbuya Nehanda, who was executed in 1898, in other words, becomes a spirit medium for what became known as the struggle for independence.

Mainstream historiography approaches this kind of history as nationalist history, history rendered as a two-part struggle of Chimurenga: first a primitive, pre-nationalist struggle that later becomes mass struggle in the 1950s, and finally an armed struggle thereafter. This is how the story of our revolution is constructed in this kind of nationalist history. But this is a reductionist understanding of Chimurenga as an ethic of revolution and as an ethic of struggle. Chimurenga is (or comes from) the name of the ancestor Murenga. Chimurenga means "a thing of Murenga"—something we do in the name of Murenga. Chimurenga is thus an intergenerational spirit of struggle. So, what you find in the work of someone like Terence Ranger—who is canonical in the writing of African history—is that he attributes the writing of the historical consciousness of Chimurenga to himself because he has gone into the archive.

Visit the *Guardian's* obituary of Ranger and you will see him pictured with nationalist leaders at Salisbury

Airport, five years before he was deported.² In the picture he is wearing the traditional headgear, which, at the time, was favored by the African nationalists. When Joshua Nkomo came back from an overseas trip soon after, he was met at the airport by a veteran from the first Chimurenga war who gave him a scepter from that war engraved with the words "Go on and continue the struggle in our name." In history that is accessible in the national archives, people like this veteran supposedly did not know what was happening. They needed to be gifted history by those with access to the academy and thus the capacity to connect two discrete moments in time. In this view of what it means to write history, Chimurenga becomes the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), and a matter of the gun. Such Western-centric and archival-based modes of understanding nationalist struggle erase the multiple ways in which people have always struggled.

Mbuya Nehanda, I mentioned earlier, is usually referred to as a spirit medium of the nationalist struggle. But in fact, Mbuya Nehanda is a spirit that has existed for centuries prior to and beyond the colonial encounter in 1898. Our entire history is thus reduced to that particular militarized clash, and people like her or spirits like her get disfigured and transformed into purposes that they were not meant for. So, for example, I was born in the Mbuya Nehanda maternity ward in Harare. The hospital is how many Zimbabweans first encounter this figure. She has become a womb of the nation and a womb of death. People are dying in that hospital. What does it mean to reduce her to that figure? You think about the fact that the tree from which she was hanged was knocked over by a municipal worker a few years ago, and this was a tree that was directly opposite the State House (official residence of the president of Zimbabwe). At the same time, you have Cecil John Rhodes's tomb, which remains intact and has been looked after all these years.

So, what does re-memory do? What is the function of these different ways that people re-member or choose to buy into particular kinds of historical imaginations? This practice of re-memory has become important in my work. Re-memory brings into view things that are beyond the archive. It helps me destabilize the archive, as a mode of *critical fabulation*, in Saidiya Hartman's terms.³ If a spirit medium speaks in the voice of an ancestor, what is my citational practice around that? Do I take that "spirit voice" as seriously as Terence Ranger's account? Those are very serious questions to think about when I am writing history and doing history.

BK: Thank you Panashe. In preparing for our conversation today, I re-read an excerpt from Kevin Young's *The Grey Album: On the Blackness of Blackness*, published in an old issue of *PEN America: A Journal for Writers and Reader*, which I think relates to your work. In the excerpt, Young writes about something he calls the "shadow book," "the book we don't have but know of, a book that may haunt the very book in our hands."⁴ The shadow book haunts us, exerts its power over us by its very unwrittenness. For me, the shadow book in Zimbabwean letters and political life—the most important book that we must contend with—is Robert Mugabe's unwritten autobiography. So much of the contestation over our contemporary history, it seems to me, relates to that unwritten work. May I ask you for your thoughts on that?

PC: I'm not convinced that we are going to get a lot from his book. I think it would have been great for the archive, and also to hear things in his words. As a historian, I think it would be incredibly useful to have his words, his accounting of his time, but I don't trust him to have been honest with us. It even sounds silly to say that; what does that even mean? We don't know who would have written it, or whether he would have had a ghostwriter.

I suppose there is nothing new about us not having access to our figures. I'm still mourning the fact that we don't have Winnie Mandela's autobiography. That's the one book I really want to read.

Otherwise, I'm used to silences in the archive. It's a different kind of engagement with the world where you don't always have to have the answer. Not everything needs to be revealed. Being able to sit with the discomfort of silence is important. I suppose then you have to learn how to hear the silences, listen to the silences.

BK: Imraan, there is a fascinating anecdote in your book about Nelson Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom*, an account of how collaborative the writing of that book was.⁵ Books like that are unconcerned with the literary circuit of value—reviews, prizes, festivals. A book like *Long Walk to Freedom* has a different function altogether as a decidedly political text.

Imraan Coovadia: *A Long Walk to Freedom* was written by three different people, including Mac Maharaj. Notes for it were taken in prison. Nelson Mandela's contribution is always uncertain. When we look at who wrote *Long Walk to Freedom* and who co-wrote and then edited it later, it's a really complicated text. It's hard to say how much of it is Richard Stengel, how much of it is Nelson Mandela, and how much of it is Mac Maharaj. It's clearly a collaborative text meant to present Mandela

in particular ways—as an acceptable, moderate revolutionary. That said, you can still look at certain episodes and ask about them in terms of their credibility.

I talk about such credible episodes in my book, such as the one where Mandela is offered a teacup at his law firm and told something like "Look, we're not going to be segregating the teacups. You can use any teacup you want, but here's your teacup." The point being, of course, that he has to use just that one teacup. Another time he is in Johannesburg, sees a poor white woman, and he finds himself feeling really sorry for her, sorer than he would for a black beggar, and thinks about what that means for him. Or another episode is from the early 1960s where he gets on an airplane flown by a black African pilot for the first time and he's terrified it will crash. For me, those moments have psychological credibility. They tell us what it's like to grow up in a world controlled by white people in which you've never seen a black person fly a plane before, a world in which you've never seen a poor white person. I think Mandela's recounting of these episodes is authentic and interesting. I think it's also what is so rich about him as a person.

Even if Mandela's autobiography, memoirs, and published letters are purified and distilled, leaving out uncomfortable information, I think the story of a life that is not really an armed life, but a revolutionary life of a certain kind is remarkable. And when you combine that with the prison experiences and his amazing ability to feel his way into a problem, as well as the connections he makes with other more academic intellectuals, I think it's an incredible archive we have—as you put it, Pansahe—of all kinds of information, cases, and data of a different kind. And I don't think Mandela's autobiography has been appreciated as such.

BK: What led you to write about these three figures—Leo Tolstoy, Mohandas Gandhi, and Nelson Mandela—and why now?

IC: Some books you can write and they're projects and you finish them, while other books change you. I think in many ways, this book changed me. When I think about how I want to educate my children, or when I think about the psychological exercises that Mandela trained himself to do and his connection to his children, or Tolstoy's and Gandhi's attempts to set up schools and change the hands-on education of children, I find it very inspiring.

As for what drew me to Gandhi, Tolstoy, and Mandela, people have generally known that Tolstoy and Gandhi had a very close or, rather, suggestive relation-

ship. But what has been written about the relationship was not to my satisfaction. It was either sentimental or very conventionalized. I didn't think that Gandhi's connection to Tolstoy was fully explored. I didn't think Gandhi's career in South Africa, and his own internally generated ideas about revolution, violence, and change, had been thoroughly considered either, in terms of intellectual history. Gandhi's development in South Africa had been simplified and not really appreciated. Again, it is full of interesting civil interactions. I speak a little in my introduction about a particular lawsuit in which Gandhi was involved with my great-great-great uncle, Ebrahim Saleji Coovadia, who was arrested and charged in 1906 for traveling on a Johannesburg tram. The image of Gandhi that we have is an image created from the US civil rights movement, that he gets pushed off a train in the same way Rosa Parks gets pushed off a bus, basically, and that's the start of a civil rights activism. I think that completely underestimates how original and honestly weird and eccentric his path was.

I also noticed that Mandela was interested in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. It almost goes without saying that Mandela and Gandhi have often been compared because in a sense Mandela inherited many of the structures of defiance and seeds of resistance that Gandhi helped to plant. When people try to categorize Mandela, they put him alongside various kinds of extremely militarized third world transitions like Mozambique, or Angola, or Zimbabwe. He doesn't belong in those transitions. South Africa's transition wasn't anything of that kind. I felt he belonged somewhere else. It's interesting to think about Mandela as more closely connected to an idea about violence that he holds in common with Tolstoy and Gandhi. That's why I started writing the book, and, as I started writing, I realized that the inner lives and development of all three of these writers were rich in a comparable way.

When I was in grad school [at Yale], I got an understanding of how John Milton's political pamphlets related to John Locke's ideas and how Locke's ideas about the colony were connected to Andrew Marvell's poetry, etcetera. There is an amazing sense of density in this Western tradition of reading the canon. I feel like when we write about South Africa and Africa more generally, we lose that sense of the density of a tradition.

When I grew up, books were really precious. They were literally passed hand-to-hand. We had secret books in our house, books printed in Russia, illegal books, handed from person to person around the city for people to read. In a way, intellectual horizons were

much more compact and closed. I wanted to capture some of that feeling and also what it must have meant for Gandhi to have a very limited number of books as influences, and for Mandela also to have, say, fourteen books that really shaped him—or were allowed to shape his thinking—as opposed to the four thousand websites that we read every day, on top of books and all kinds of other things. The subjects of my book had a much more concentrated intellectual and political life than what we imagine.

These men also really tried to see life as it was, and how it would be without them in the world. One of Tolstoy's most famous letters are those he addressed, for example, to the Tsar, under the guise of a person who will soon be out of this world. When he imagines that he has a fatal illness, he's possessed by it and thinks it's wonderful; when Mandela is faced by the threat of death, similarly, he obviously goes beyond it. The same clearly holds for Gandhi. They all tried to take a position on the world as if they weren't in it. And I think that's an extremely powerful political, intellectual, and cosmological move in their politics, one that someone like Barack Obama couldn't make. When Obama gave his talk at Mandela's funeral celebration in 2014, his real point was that Mandela made him want to be a better person. And I thought no, that's really not it. The point about Mandela, Gandhi, and Tolstoy is that you try to see outside your own interests. They all practiced spiritual improvement in all kinds of things with great intensity. And they didn't see the task of making themselves good to be the point of other people.

BK: Over the last decade, say, and perhaps even longer, Mandela has fallen from the saintly position he once occupied in the South African imagination. When Winnie Mandela died in 2017—and again a year later, at the centenary of his birth—it felt as if there were a nationwide referendum on the life and ideas of Nelson Mandela. “A reckoning of unexpected sharpness,” you write, “with a widespread repudiation of his legacy.”⁶ What do you make of his position in South Africa today? The legacies of Winnie and Nelson Mandela have been pitted against each other and, to put it coarsely, the fact that Nelson Mandela is so beloved by white people, as much as Winnie Mandela is loathed, casts doubt on his stature in South Africa's liberation history.⁷

IC: Without getting into too much trouble with anybody, I'll say: I think it reveals something very deep about you, whether you think the point of revolution is to achieve justice or the point is to achieve, to put it in a conservative way, prosperity, national well-being.

One of the articles that had a huge effect on me when I was thinking about violence spoke of how when perpetrators of violence are interviewed, even in South Africa, even men who do the most terrible things, the idea that often drives them is that they are doing something just—to avenge something, for example, or to set accounts right, or to put down someone who needed to be put down. The micro-sociology of violence is exactly the opposite of what we think it is. People who engage in violence are very often pursuing justice. And it's something I've always worried about in South Africa.

I think Mandela understood that the costs of pursuing justice were ultimately going to be too high. Because in this case, justice, violence, and instability went together. It's not that Mandela ignored the unfairnesses of the postapartheid order or was insensitive to them. It's not that he didn't understand the unfairness of leaving many crimes unpunished. Many of them, I believe, should have been punished or should be punished. I get to this in a book I'm currently writing about poisoning in South Africa. The crimes are really off-the-charts, vast human rights violations. But I think Mandela understood that, ultimately, you need stability in the country in order to give people the chance for what he wanted for them. This is a profound question of where a political revolution needs to stop, and where the language and tactics of revolution need to end.

Over the last few years in South Africa, we've lived through very tumultuous times, whether in our universities or our institutions more broadly. Everything from our Revenue Service to political parties have been shaken in ways that are almost impossible to describe in conventional political terms. It's not simply a question of racial polarization. It's not a question of ideology. It's a question of coarsening and corruption of an extraordinary kind. I wouldn't have understood it if I hadn't lived through it. Some of my book came out of that experience; I was trying to understand that experience of coarsening and corruption and trying to see the impulses that had led to that moment. I wouldn't have written this book in 1990, first because I was too young, but also because the conclusions that I've come to are just different than what they were in 1990.

PC: I am part of the generation that contests the Mandela legacy. A popular movement of my generation is Fallism, a movement that began with "Rhodes Must Fall," when shit was literally thrown at the statue of Cecil John Rhodes in 2015 and then, within a month, I think, the statue came down. These protests symbolize broad dissatisfaction with the 1994 project. You

could reduce it all to dissatisfaction with the statue and with the university curriculum, but it really was a referendum on the 1994 project as a whole, and on the negotiated settlement brought about by its torchbearers. When you go back to some of the Fallist protests, you see signs that say, "Our parents were sold dreams in 1994. We want a refund."

I came to South Africa as a "born free" from Zimbabwe. It's a particular function of southern Africa's postapartheid, postindependence settler colonies that this strange neologism has been coined to signify the idea that one is "born free" of history, free of the past, because you're born at an arbitrary date. Well, it's not that arbitrary; it's postapartheid, postindependence. There is a kind of generational tension. There are good intentions and strong desires to have us free from particular kinds of burdens. The born free generation was the symbol of what's going to happen if people were just given an education and opportunities. For a long time, many of us did in fact buy into this, the idea that everything was going to be okay if these particular things changed.

This generation's rejection of the 1994 settlement is so poignant. There have always been critiques of Congress, of the Charterists; those critiques don't start with us. The fact that the Pan-Africanist Congress, for example, did not show up at the CODESA⁸ negotiations was really a critique of the 1994 project and the fact that land was not redistributed. But there is something about our generation repudiating Mandela in particular. There was a way in which the 1994 project hung heavily on us as a kind of albatross.

For these reasons, with our generation, there is a fierce push back against the figure of Nelson Mandela. One of the refrains you hear about Mandela is that he sold out. I am not sympathetic to the African National Congress (ANC) or Mandela, but I think this is an ahistorical view of where we are. I think that the real problem is reducing, once again, our struggles to individuals, who in turn become paradigmatic figures through which we understand everything.

Imraan, there's a point in your book where you speak about the fact that our historical horizons are often only as long as the oldest person in our societies.⁹ If you go to Robben Island, for example, you'd be forgiven for thinking that the entire history of Robben Island is reducible to Mandela and the Rivonia Trial,¹⁰ not knowing that Robben Island has been used as a prison since the seventeenth century or all the ways in which we have had anti-colonial struggles since then.

How we engage and think about contestations in black struggle become unnecessarily limited as a result. We need to recognize that there hasn't always been consensus within the ANC, and there hasn't been consensus within the Africanist traditions. If we don't recognize this we end up erasing how we understand what history is in South Africa and Southern Africa. I'm pretty sure this happens across the entire African continent.

I'm particularly interested in the language around civilization and civil rights. There is a way in which, if I'm not mistaken, the Africanist school, and particularly ZANU-PF, would disparage the ANC as a glorified civil rights movement. That's reductionist, but the point is to ask, what is the critique that is being made? I'm less interested in whether Mandela was a sellout than in the question: what was the critique being made in 1912 when the ANC was formed? What was the critique being made when the first political parties were in formation? And outside the so-called modern nationalist movements, what were the critiques made by African sovereigns at the time? I love C. L. R. James and his *Black Jacobins*, for instance, but turning black struggle into a Marxist revolution erases all the epistemologies and cosmologies at play in the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804). We know that the night before the Haitian Revolution started, there was an intense spiritual ceremony. What were people talking about then? How were people thinking about struggle then? For me, it's similarly interesting to think about what happened when the ANC was struggling in 1912, and what their critique of the secular state was. Were people saying that fundamentally it's illegitimate? What was the ANC saying versus what, for example, Bambatha was saying? Even within the so-called Zulu nation, not everyone was in support of the 1906 Bambatha Rebellion. What are the different ways in which we're thinking about that? This is all to say that I don't think that we have a long enough memory.

The fact that we don't have a long historical memory really impoverishes the way in which we have our debates in South Africa. As a result, we don't really get to know that there are contestations around the question of what to do with the problem of settler colonial modernity. How do we deal with this crisis that has landed upon us? Reducing our struggles to individuals, who become paradigmatic figures through whom we understand everything, obscures this history.

When we talk about Zimbabwe, for example, I am very frustrated about how people talk about land. You would think the land question begins in 2000 as if it's

not something that begins, we could say, in 1896 or 1890. Even that's a short historical memory. We could start with the Portuguese. The conventional ways in which we understand intellectual history, through texts, are insufficient for broadening our historical imagination, our historical horizons, and re-memory. We need to think about song, for example, and ask what people were singing at the time in question. We need to think about oral traditions. There is a whole way in which people are thinking about things that's not always accessed in traditional academic texts. Most texts try to understand this broader horizon through the lens of modern nationalist movements without trying for a more expansive understanding of what black struggle has been in the past and can be in the future.

Elleni Centime Zeleke: Here, Imraan, could you please restate why you wrote your book on nonviolence and how you see the relationship between violence, social change, and revolution that you were trying to draw out? Could you do this while keeping in mind these comments by Panashe, including the question of why this book *now*?

IC: The question of why this book now is a very good question. And by the way, I agree with almost everything Panashe has said, including her comment about using Zimbabwe as a model in South Africa for critiquing South African things. Tolstoy, Mandela, and Gandhi understood that part of struggle is constructive economic activity. This is essential. It is part of what we think about when we think about struggle, whether it's black struggle or anti-colonial struggle. I think of Tolstoy as a kind of revolutionary in this mode as well. Tolstoy had a personal interest in making boots and gloves, as well as an interest in creating schools and reorganizing constructive labor. With Gandhi you obviously have these different ashrams, but also work camps of different kinds, different practices of labor. And with Mandela, there is an appreciation of business, science, and ongoing economic life. They understood all that as integral to what a new society would mean.

I think we need to bring to ideas of revolution such positive models of what comes out of the other end. Let me give examples. Economic decentralization could be one such positive model that is present in all of their writings. They all share an interest in labor of a certain kind. Part of being a mature person should be to dirty your hands, wash the dishes, and do menial labor. If you live a life of privilege in a country like India or South Africa, you really can have a sense that menial labor is not for me, that people who do menial labor are really

at the bottom of the pile, and I don't get my hands dirty with that. I think that refusal of such views is one aspect of these radical revolutionary traditions.

Decentering violence is also important. Even if Gandhi and Mandela had wanted to fight, they were in situations where they weren't going to win. Rhodesia was a special case. It was one of the few chances for a military victory. In South Africa, it wouldn't have been possible for a long period of time. I think this is what made them think about the other parts of a revolution. How do we achieve change through nonmilitary means? When you look back at the 1970s and 1980s, even if the ANC never waged a very credible guerrilla campaign, the pressure on people like P. W. Botha and F. W. de Klerk was extraordinary. The typical American reading of the South African transition sees the ANC as a civil rights movement. I think we should go the other way. I think we should situate this dynamic in another tradition, one that includes Gandhi, Mandela, Martin Luther King, and other radical figures, and to see how they were part of our own ways of doing things.

Who knew that Mandela was reading Tolstoy? Why was he reading Tolstoy? He didn't love novels and has absolutely nothing interesting to say about any novel except for *War and Peace*, which is strange. He reads Nadine Gordimer and keeps trying to figure out what white liberals in South Africa are like, what they think, and what Afrikaners are like. He reads books in a way that no one who's ever done a literary PhD would. We would never read a book to learn about how white Afrikaans farmers think, but that's what Mandela did. That's how books were useful for him, I suppose. So, in my book I wanted to look at our traditions and to think about and accept all the imperfections we now know about Mandela, Gandhi, and Tolstoy, to see if they still offer a kind of vision that is outside of both a certain kind of postcolonial radicalism and a certain kind of liberal denialism or universalism.

ECZ: Imraan, correct me if I'm wrong; in the chapter that focuses on Mandela, you talk about what it means to write in the context of social change. Referencing David Scott, you suggest that anti-colonial movements always end up in a kind of liberal settlement, and you ask what the point is of writing if everything just ends up in a liberal settlement. Using the example of J. M. Coetzee, you push against this idea of being literary as a solely liberal practice. With that, I'd like you to talk about what writing is for you in this book and more generally.

IC: Your point is very well taken. I think that the ethic of writing as a kind of nonviolent consideration

is an appealing one. It's in Tolstoy and to an extent in Gandhi, and probably most of all in Mandela, whose letters are extraordinary models of consideration and reflection. They are some of the greatest letters I know of by any political prisoner. Even Mandela's storytelling abilities—I talk in the book a little bit about the jokes he tells—are extraordinary. I think we should think about storytelling and jokes and anecdotes as part of politics.

As for the darker side of what you brought up with Coetzee, I focus on the scene in his novel *Disgrace* of three black men raping a woman, because I think it's inevitable and I don't think it's properly been dealt with. It seems to me that the argument that many white South African critics made is as follows: If you're a sophisticated person and you take literature as literature, you understand that this is literary form. You don't take the fact that these men are black seriously. What you're really meant to analyze is something else. I think the argument of Coetzee's defenders fits into what are at this point relatively old-fashioned ideas of literary production.

Why can Coetzee write this scene so closely after the end of apartheid? It's extraordinarily racially charged. The way it explodes is quite shocking. His defenders argue that people who are sophisticated literary people understand that a book is really about its form; it's about looking at the frame and not looking through the window, they say. While in some ways we may all believe something like that, it's clearly being used here for quite sinister purposes. In some ways I find more appealing the naive tendentious ways Mandela would read a book, modeled in how he pillages Gordimer to find out why white liberals think this way. There's something real about that hunger and that intensity for writing. The kind of weird second-order provocations that you find about race in Coetzee are much less appealing if you don't buy into or find compelling modernist points about literary form.

I have waded through many thousands of pages of Gandhi, in addition to a lot of Mandela and Tolstoy, reading in this way. Most of it is very dull. And then all of a sudden you come across amazing things. These men wrote incredible things in the course of writing many hundreds of thousands of words. As academics we live to see those moments when someone finally figures out: "this is what my life is about," or "this is the thought I've been trying to create; this is the story I'd like to tell." In Mandela's case, it is like: this is the way I want to tell a joke. There is something really extraordinary about

that. I think the lesson for me in terms of writing is that there are many kinds of writing; some of them are even more productive and even more original than what we think of as literary writing or the canon.

ECZ: What, then, is the critique in here of liberal settlement that you were driving at earlier? How is your way of thinking about writing now a critique of liberal settlement?

IC: Liberalism and corporate writing go together very well, which is to say that liberalism and the book market go together very well. Where does liberalism fall short? Tolstoy, Gandhi, and Mandela all experimented with different models of publication and teaching. They tried to find different ways to circulate ideas. Gandhi was always starting up different journals and finding different ways to communicate to people. As for Tolstoy, the book he loved the most was his book for school children, which continued selling in Russia up to the 1920s. These alternative ways of thinking about writing and reading no longer exist. In a sense we live inside an international media and publishing structure that is quite impermeable to many kinds of ideas and forms of writing.

ECZ: What do you make of that, Panashe?

PC: Someone like Nelson Mandela has three people working on his autobiography. Winnie Mandela, on the other hand, doesn't have an autobiography. Black women's contributions to struggle and a whole range of things—our epistemologies, our cosmologies—are often going to be erased because we didn't have access to printing presses and other such things. The challenge, then, for us is to think more expansively about what it is to be an intellectual, and not to be reductive and use terms like *organic intellectual* as if this were sort of a second order form of intellectual. Rather, we must understand that these other forms of being intellectual are just as important. This means thinking about Winnie Mandela's visibility, for example, and how she was very deliberate about the ways in which she presented herself. Understanding the theatrical mode of the Rivonia Trial, we should ask what it means for her to show up in Xhosa regalia the way she did, understanding herself as a text. As someone who was banned, she was very deliberate, whether wearing the ANC colors or her prison numbers. How can that be understood? We cannot say that she wasn't an intellectual or that she didn't think clearly about what she was doing. What does it mean when she deliberately showed up wearing military regalia or other such things in particular instances? These are important questions.

Returning to the subject of song, one of my playlists is called "Pungwe." Pungwe is a particular mode of political struggle. My family will tell you that on the first day that one of my uncles who went to the war came back to their village, he knocked on the window and said he must go around to others to tell them all to go to the clearing to hold a Pungwe. This means that we were to sing political songs the whole night and be conscientized. There was a chain of command, and a political commissaire told us about the revolution that we're engaged in. This conscientizing took place through particular songs.

My parents could tell you about the Bolsheviks, for example, and how they came to know about them through Pungwes. They could tell you about what was happening in Jamaica. Similarly, when I speak to Jamaicans I know now, they say something like, "Oh we knew about Mandela; there was a song, there was this and that." I don't think we pay enough attention to that, especially if we want to understand struggle beyond particular political figures and the ways in which "mass consciousness" informs struggle.

Arash Davari: I've really been taken by how both Panashe and Imraan have emphasized continuity. I'm wondering if you might help me think a bit more about how continuities can be revolutionary, how continuities can in fact be breaks. The request feels a bit paradoxical, because we tend to think of breaks as ruptures and violent splits. But it seems like both of you are imagining something else.

IC: I think the paradox of all revolutions is that the people left behind after the revolution were brought up before the revolution. Different revolutionary theories have tried to deal with that in different ways. The French Revolution did this by changing the dates so that there wasn't an original date. I think one of the most interesting things—speaking to the continuities between Zimbabwe, Rhodesia, and South Africa—is that some continuities have become visible only recently. There is a year zero to some extent for the state, but even that date or even giving a year zero at all is contestable. Ultimately, a lot of our values and a lot of the ways that we live are formed long before any transition.

PC: I want to go back to the concepts of re-mem-bering, re-memory, and reimagining in my work. I often use the metaphor of water to describe these three, which I think of as equivalent. Water goes through constant changes of form. But it always remains water. Right now, many of the most radical and exciting sites for this reimagining are aesthetic, sonic, somatic, or kinetic.

Dance cultures, more than published books, can often show us how people are doing things and reimagining.

This is of course not the first time music has circulated and been transformed across the African continent and the Atlantic. We saw this previously with jazz, which came from the African continent, passed in its own ways through the ordeal of the Atlantic, to then come back again to Africa. We are constantly regenerating ourselves through this back and forth, this call and response, in music and in life, in re-remembering.

Imraan's book speaks to the turn of the twentieth century, a period of tumult and violence, particularly among different labor regimes. At the time, the Pan-African Conference referred to the South African war as a way of thinking about imperial citizenship. It was a referendum for colonial subjects across the empire. What was going to happen to the Indian question and to the Native question, they thought, was going to be decided with the South African war. But in the same period, you're getting the transatlantic expansion of churches like the AME. You get ideas like those reflected in the headlines of the *Rhodesia Herald* around 1906, which said something like, "Ask any man on the street what the trouble in South Africa is, and he'll answer without a doubt that it's Ethiopianism." They attributed the Bambatha Rebellion to Ethiopianism and Africans' spirit of rebelliousness.

Thabo Mbeki gave a speech that relates to this in the early 2010s at the University of Addis Ababa. In it, he conflates Ethiopianism with the nation-state, but that's a whole other conversation. For us now, what matters is that he speaks to how important Ethiopianism was in the early twentieth century, and how many African nationalists were called Ethiopians. But because there was a lot of suppression or censorship of speech, ideas, and publishing, a lot of these archives, this rich weave of history, were erased.

BK: Panashe, I'd like to ask you about nonviolence. I was a teenager during the farm invasions in Zimbabwe in March 2000 when the first white farmer was killed. The aftermath of that killing was broadcast on national television. I've never been able to explain to myself what this moment signified. On the one hand, the revolution was continuing. On the other, blood had been spilled in my name. As a young person, I asked myself: Am I okay with this? May I invite you to offer some thoughts on this.

PC: First, part of our cosmology as peoples who are now understood as Shona is reflected in the famous words of Mbuya Nehanda, "Take the gun and liberate

yourself." So, violence is not antithetical to our traditions. Across the world, it's often oppressed people who are forced to take on the mantle of nonviolence. Meanwhile, France refuses to apologize for its colonial abuses (which I think by the way is a tautology; what is colonial abuse? Colonialism is violence, so I don't know why we're wasting time talking about that).

In Zimbabwe when we decided to go to war—I say we because I do believe that it was a war I was fighting for in that expansive vision of the temporalities of past, present, and future in intergenerational struggle—it started off as sabotage. We eventually realized that this was not going to work, and that we needed to go back to the drawing board and engage in a full-on protracted struggle, which is why fighters went to Mozambique to get all kinds of reinforcements and training. But the key thing they had to do when they got back to Zimbabwe was to engage our ancestors. There are particular rituals that you have to do, as well as many taboos you have to deal with, if you're going to engage in warfare and violence.

At an interpersonal level, one of the things that really controls a lot of the emotional and spiritual universes of us as black peoples in Zimbabwe is *ngozi*, which is someone who's been wrongfully killed. The idea is that if you've done something to somebody, you are going to be haunted. Right now, I might be haunted by the spirit of someone my great-grandmother might have killed; my entire family can be called to atone for what somebody else has done. So, there is an understanding of the intergenerational nature of violence and of the ruptures that it causes, which are understood to not just stop with one person, but is a process that includes both victims and the perpetrators. The key thing is that when Zimbabweans went to war, there were particular processes and rituals that they had to do. What I hear from many of the spiritual leaders or spirit mediums I speak to is that, when they returned, they did not do the process of cleansing, whether on the national level or at the individual level of the soldiers who left people in the war [on the battlefield].

I think it is a failure of our liberal opposition movements that they do not take this kind of thing seriously. There is a lot of haunting. If you really listen to Zimbabweans speaking, they will speak about the fact that they are being haunted by x, y, and z. They will speak about the fact that because we did not do that process of national cleansing in taking ourselves out of that spirit of war, we remain in a state of warfare with ourselves, which is why a lot of things do not work. While you can

think of that at a very spiritual level, a literal spiritual level, you can also think about what the meaning is of needing to do that deep cleansing as a nation so that we understand that violence should not be our natural state, and that there are only particular conditions in which we are going to go and engage in warfare. When the ancestors had to engage in warfare, or spill blood, there were very specific guidelines for the conditions in which they could enact certain things; indeed, it's always very disciplined. But we didn't do that process in Zimbabwe.

I want now to return to land reform, which I've written about and which is quite complicated.¹¹ First, there is a huge hypocrisy in the fact that the killing of a white farmer becomes world news, while there was no such outpouring about the Gukurahundi¹² and when Mugabe was knighted. What is the meaning of placing that one white person's death as so rapturous while casting the deaths of thousands of Ndebele people as not newsworthy?

As for Zimbabwe and land reform, I think that a radical redistribution of land can never be, at least in the black world, a nonviolent process if it's going to be a fundamental redistribution. This is not to say I don't endorse a nonviolent process. That's just the fact of the matter—not because we want it to be so, but because we know that market-led land reform does not work. We've seen it in South Africa. I grew up in the era of willing buyer, willing seller in South Africa and it simply doesn't work. But the broader question I want to go back to is, what would be different if ZANU-PF [Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front] had been genuine in that moment of land reform? I'm not pro-ZANU-PF, but I am pro-land reform and understand the historic necessity for it. Let's say ZANU-PF had done it in a much more orderly fashion. Even so, you were still going to get market fallout. People who came by the gun were not going to give over their land without it. That's the way they came and it's the way they're going to leave.

Beyond that, I often think about Nongqawuse in South Africa, 1856. She was a prophetess in southern Africa in a Xhosa sovereignty, and with the increasing encroachment of the British and settler colonialism, she has a vision of the ancestors, of people from the sea who are going to free them and liberate her people. For this to happen, they have to kill cattle, so it's a mass cattle killing. I often think of that as an Afropessimist vision of the world, which is to say that the only way for this to end—if you think about Aimé Césaire—is to end the

world. To draw a line between Nongqawuse and land reform, ending this is going to necessarily mean the end of livelihood and, in that sense, it's going to mean the end of the world.

BK: Imraan, South Africa is a place where, from the very beginning, entire populations have been consigned to a premature death. In his book *The Night Trains: Moving Mozambican Miners to and from the Witwatersrand Mines, 1902–1955*, the historian Charles Van Onselen writes about how young men were taken from what was then Lourenço Marques (present day Maputo) to work in the mines in Johannesburg. Then the moment it became clear that these men were sick or going to die from working in the mines, they were sent back to their homelands, transported as cargo on the trains. From the very beginning, then—as Panashe was saying earlier—the production of black death was crucial to South African capitalism in a way that continued even post-1994. How do you imagine nonviolence in a space like this? Is it even possible in South Africa?

IC: As I'm sure you're aware, Bongani, Wouter Basson is a senior cardiologist at Mediclinic. My research shows that he is one of the most prolific poisoners in human history. He's connected to probably around a thousand poisonings. Yet he's seen as a hero by many Afrikaners. Many young Afrikaans men and women think of Basson as a hero.

I think you have to say first that there are things like this that are intolerable, yet we nonetheless continue to tolerate them in South Africa. South Africa clearly has a problem of severe interpersonal violence. It falls on two groups: black women, mostly, but also women of all kinds, and on young black men who die at an extraordinary rate.

Panashe has spoken of thinking beyond the state, and I think that's important. I think there is something genuine in the communitarianism of Mandela or Gandhi, which argues that nonviolence—particularly in the treatment of women and children, and in teaching young men to back away from fights—is a really important part of civic life. It's a deep value that we have. I think nonviolence in our context is really quite revolutionary. Our last president was an extremely violent man.

Nonviolence comes with non-antagonism (under certain circumstances). Mandela was a very forceful leader in his way, but he created a nationalism that in its nature was not antagonistic toward nationalisms. Certainly, the lessons of nonviolence are very important, and they can be learned from top to bottom in a soci-

ety. Look at how Gandhi and Mandela assessed white South Africans. They looked at the ways these people were violent, and at the ways they earned a living. Gandhi mentions that Louis Botha was a very successful farmer and that Jan Smuts was a very successful lawyer. They had areas of nonviolence in their lives, areas of collaboration, and in this way we can learn from them. To the extent that nonviolence is still a radical thing, it is something that South Africa really needs to learn for itself. It's a program that our country should have implemented twenty-five years ago, and it is never too early to start thinking in those terms.

I think what Panashe said is ultimately true. We do have to zoom out far enough and understand violence erupting and nonviolence almost impartially. We have to kind of look at stuff suspending our judgment as much as possible and understand where violence comes from, where nonviolence comes from, and how we can redirect or reduce and increase the other relatively. Having nonviolence as an inspirational ideal is part of it, but so is having an impartial understanding of where violence comes from. Any society with a tradition of forced labor also has a terrible tradition of violence—South Africa, Brazil, or anywhere with the *corvée* or slavery. If you look at the counties in the United States that had slavery, you still have high social indicators of violence hundreds of years later. We must think like social scientists about where these forces come from.

For me, nonviolence encompasses many sorts of things—many forms of collaboration, of asserting yourself, and of refusing injustice while not being sucked into a spiral of violence. And I think it's not just a spiral of violence, but also a spiral of glamourizing violence. While South Africa is not at war, its politics for the past ten years have been consumed by this extreme glamour attached to violence. I think anyone who has lived through actual violence, who sees a dead body, your parents' house blown up, or someone left without their child, has a different attitude to violence. Any country that's seen hundreds of thousands of their young men dying is going to be, and should be, more reluctant to glamourize violence. I think in that sense, practically, I'm not even sure I'm nonviolent. I was certainly in favor of the ANC's victory in 1994. Yet I still think that nonviolence is a remarkable ideal. Intellectually, it's really underestimated. We still live under the shadow of certain liberal ideas about the state and its monopoly on violence and about the American state and its role in the world, and I think they really don't get all the interesting questions about violence and nonviolence that are

there. I think one of the advantages of living in Africa is that you see the state to be such a strange thing. It doesn't have that naturalized quality that it does in the United States. So you get to thinking, why should it have the monopoly on violence, and what kind of monopoly does it have? What kind of organization is it, anyway? Sociologically, a sense of the state's strangeness is useful, and I think it's the reason why Tolstoy, Gandhi, and Mandela had these amazing political imaginations. They were forced to go back to first principles and think about what a state does, and what kind of allegiance it requires, and so on.

PC: I'm never really interested in talking about violence and nonviolence, personally, because of the limited ways in which we think about them and who these questions are posed to. Violence is thought about as a gun and just bodily. While this is certainly an important part of it, there are all kinds of psychic and cosmological violences created.

We're contending with all kinds of violence—cultural, epistemic, spiritual—that our governments do not have the imagination to grapple with. We need that process of re-membling, and I don't think our political parties have the historical understanding of what it is that we're dealing with. Until we have that holistic understanding of the violences that we're living with, not just of the gun, but all those different forms, we're going to keep on seeing it meted out. What we need is to adequately grapple with the ruptures of transatlantic slavery and settler-colonial modernity beyond just the gun and the cannon. We need to grapple with all the ways in which these ruptures have fundamentally dismembered us. What are we going to do, and what imagination is required for us to bring about a different kind of healing for us as peoples?

IC: People would ask Gandhi and Mandela in their lifetimes something about this, and it was always treated like a joke. I think they always realized that the first people they were trying to teach nonviolence to were white men. Gandhi wrote things that come across as jokes about Western civilization being a good idea, but I think there's something quite serious about it. Mandela was trying to teach his jailers about honor. Certainly, the last four years in America have taught us that the message of nonviolence has to go out to everybody. It's not just a message for Africa or Africans or outside the US. The US needs to hear about nonviolence again.

BK: For my part, I agree with what Panashe said earlier about haunting. My grandfather was abducted and killed during the Chimurenga war in 1979 but my

grandmother hardly ever said a word about it until the day she died, forty years later. He was a smoker, and from what little I know, his remains were identified by his teeth. Although my grandmother almost never talked about the war, she named my cousin, the first child in our family born after independence in 1980, Nokuthula, which means “the one who brings peace.” But my own experience is that we’ve never actually lived in peacetime; we don’t even have a grammar for peace. We’re bound to violence. I remember that after the 2017 coup in Zimbabwe, which Panashe writes about so astutely in *These Bones Will Rise Again*, Emmerson Mnangagwa, who took over the presidency, began his first press conference with the call: *Pasi nemhandu!* (Down with the traitors). All our language is geared toward war and revolution without end. What revolution does not end in peace?

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Notes

1. Recent scholarship has productively addressed the return of non-violence as a question for academic debate. See, e.g., Devji, “The

Return of Nonviolence.” The roundtable staged here raises similar themes but adopts a different form, less concerned with direct intervention in disciplinary frameworks and more invested in the generative possibilities of active conversation among writers currently situated in the global South.

2. Alexander and Maxwell, “Terrance Ranger Obituary.”

3. Hartman, “Venus.”

4. Young, *The Gray Album*, 11.

5. Coovadia, *Revolution and Non-violence*, 151–52.

6. Coovadia, *Revolution and Non-violence*, 120.

7. Achille Mbembe brilliantly articulated the reasons why Mandela’s revolution is seen, especially by younger generations, as a failure: see Mbembe, “Rule of Property versus Rule of the Poor?”

8. These were a series of meetings that took place in the early 1990s involving various South African political groups and held under the banner of the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA).

9. Coovadia, *Revolution and Non-violence*, 41.

10. The Rivonia Trial took place between 1963 and 1964 in South Africa and led to the imprisonment of Nelson Mandela and other leaders of the anti-apartheid resistance.

11. Chigumadzi, “Murimi Munhu.”

12. The Gukurahundi was a series of massacres of Ndebele civilians carried out by the Zimbabwe National Army from early 1983 to late 1987.

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